

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
MFA FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

by

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A THESIS

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IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS


IN

PAINTING

DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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Final Visual Presentation

submitted by KARA NINA MAEHLER in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art.

The University of Alberta

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DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

GRADUATE STUDIES

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I hereby release the following works for incorporation into the University Collections,
University of Alberta, as part of the Master of Fine Arts Thesis Collection:

TITLE

DATE

MEDIUM

SIZE

Sahneschläger / 1998 / acrylic on burlap / 170 cm x 116 cm x 11 cm

Standoff / stalemate/ deadlock - I look for a harmony of extreme opposites in my work

The subject matter from which I derive my dimensional paintings are common everyday objects, given drama and mystery, by how they are re-introduced to the viewer in abstracted form. I use photography as a starting point and within the confines of the square viewfinder I focus in on one object, or sections of one object. My intent is to create a visual ambiguity, of distorted yet recognizable forms. The photographic compositions are then enlarged and transformed into objects in their own right. This I try to achieve by turning the photographic enlargements into modeled three-dimensional surfaces. I am trying to find a harmony between modeling and depicting an object. What results does not function as a window to another world, as in traditional representational painting but becomes an abstract transformations of the observed world. What was a reflection of insignificant everyday subject matter now appears as a partially three-dimensional object of a more sublime meaning. The mundane subject is now larger than life, shown at odd distorted angles, enveloped in a dramatic contrast of light and shadow. As I paint I contrast the dimensional reality against the optical illusion. I look to establish a spatial ambiguity by emphasizing the planes of burlap, out of which the painting is created, by painting in shadows and edges, dividing the relief into spatial planes. These planes appear to have as much, or perhaps more depth than the modeled surfaces themselves, contrasting illusion and reality.

I was first intrigued by the harmony of abstract compositions of material and illusion when I took painting courses in Germany as a child. Part of the Curriculum was a gallery walk every week as the course itself was taught at the Wallraf-Richards Museum in Cologne. I remember how fascinated I was to find that those highly realistic looking Dutch master paintings broke down into nothing more than abstract compositions of colors and textures. More recently, as a undergraduate student I started working in clay relief because here too I found a harmony of material and illusory depth. I thought of it as a way of combining drawing and sculpture. Objects that come out of the picture plane and objects that "appear" to recede were favourite elements of mine. However these works did not achieve that material/illusion tension one would find in a painting of a crystal glass for example. Up close the illusion of the real object would break down into nothing more than a network of expressive brushstrokes. The feeling I was trying to convey to the observer could be likened to that a visitor to Madam Tuseau wax figure Museum would have upon encountering one of the historical figures up close and finding it difficult to separate the powerful illusion from the material reality.

In my pursuit to recreate, capture, and heighten that tension of reality versus illusion I have not looked to any one particular artists of the past to guide me. Nevertheless, having had the opportunity to observe original art first hand since early childhood, the reality of art (painting in particular) has undoubtedly influenced me. In outward appearance my work can be said to relate in some respect to that of Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine, and Jasper Johns. Like Claes Oldenburg's soft sculptures, my reliefs are everyday objects enlarged to such an extent that they are transformed into a type of architectural fragment. Claes Oldenburg's sculptures however do not have the atmospheric quality that my painting have. Jim Dine also combines illusion and reality in some of his work even though he collages actual objects into his work and also paints in shadows. Jasper Johns' textured paintings of common objects also straddle abstraction and figurative art, combining illusionistic representation with a modeled 3D reality.

"Modern Painters could work with surface matter and subject matter, with abstraction and representation not to privilege one over the other but to keep them in a dialectical tension where surface turns to subject and subject to surface and neither seemed to be quite what it was." - Fred Orton "Figuring Jasper Johns"

Kara Nina Mähler, March 1999

Untitled 1997, acrylic on burlap, 140cm x 120 cm x 8

Untitled 1997, acrylic on burlap, 168cm x 162cm x 10cm

Sadienendose 1997, acrylic on burlap, 146cm x 122cm x 9cm

Bueroklammer 1997, acrylic on burlap, 139cm x 101cm x 12cm

Eiszange 1998, acrylic on burlap, 261cm x 221cm x 14cm

Knoblauchpresse, acrylic on burlap, 197cm x 137cm x 15 cm

Heringsdose 1998, acrylic on burlap, 150cm x 122cm x 13cm

Sahneschlaeger 1998, acrylic on burlap, 170cm x 116cm x 11cm

Schuhloeffel 1999, acrylic on burlap, 140cm x 178cm x 15cm

Maulschluessel 1999, acrylic on burlap, 135cm x 172cm x 21cm

Tuerschloss 1999, acrylic on burlap, 232cm x 216cm x 20 cm

Grillspiess 1999, acrylic on burlap, 196cm x 118cm x 23cm

Zange 1999, acrylic on burlap, 178cm x 112cm x 10cm

Dosenoeffner 1999, acrylic on burlap, 216cm x 106cm x 7cm

Fassung 1999, acrylic on burlap, 123cm x 161cm x 10cm

Katzenfutterbuechse 1999, acrylic on burlap, 203cm x 139cm x 19cm

Lochzange 1999, acrylic on burlap, 153cm x 123cm x 14cm

Mischgetraenkesieb 1999, acrylic on burlap, 150cm x 218cm x 10 cm

Lochstanzer 1999, acrylic on burlap, 227cm x 186cm x 14cm

Korkenzieher 1999, acrylic on burlap, 323cm x 467cm x 12cm

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